

SANTOS FARM
1481 Mowry Avenue
Fremont
Alameda County
California 94536

HABS No. CA-2289

HABS
CAL.
1-FREMO,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SANTOS FARM

HABS No. CA-2289

Location: 1481 Mowry Avenue
Fremont
Alameda County
California 94536

HABS
CAL,
1-FREMO.

U.S.G.S. Niles Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
10.590340.4157400

4-

Present Owner: Joseph G. Damas
1481 Mowry Avenue
Fremont, CA 94536

Present Occupant: Same

Present Use: Residence and farm

Significance: The Santos Farm complex is historically significant as one of the few remaining farm complexes in southern Alameda County. The property has been associated with the Portuguese community for over a century. Architecturally, the house and barn are representative of regional types which are rapidly disappearing. The house is further distinguished by its generous application of tongue-and-groove redwood siding on interior walls and ceilings.

PART I DESCRIPTION

A. Site

The Santos Farm is situated on a triangular, 1.07-acre parcel on the west side of Mowry Avenue in the city of Fremont, Washington Township, California. The widest portion of the parcel faces east to the road, with its narrow rear portion tapering to a point to the northwest. The buildings of the complex are grouped around a graveled yard near the property's street frontage, with a house on the north, a barn at the center, a Quonset-like shed on the south, two sheds to the rear, and the remnant of a water tower directly behind the house. A small orchard containing approximately 30 fruit and nut trees occupies the tapering rear portion of the parcel. Landscaping includes a lawn between the house and barn which is planted in shade trees and a tall palm. A white-painted picket fence extends in front of the house. Concrete-block walls run most of the length of the parcel's long sides, converging at the rear. Recent condominium developments adjoin the site on the north and south. A large tract of

vacant land across Mowry Avenue provides an expansive vista east to Mission Peak.

B. House (ca.1880-1885)

The house is a wood-frame, T-plan structure situated near the northeast corner of the parcel. It consists of two rectangular-plan sections built at different times. The front section, approximately 26' long by 24' wide, contains one and one-half stories and an attic. The gable roof terminates in jerkinheads at the side elevations, with a central cross-gable facing to the front. Front and side elevations are symmetrical. The front elevation has a central transomed entry flanked and surmounted by paired windows. Each side elevation has two windows on the ground level and one window centrally placed at the upper level. Windows have wood sash and are tall and narrow in their proportions. Windows on the side walls, 34" wide by 6' high, are two-over-two double-hung; those on the front, measuring 28" wide by 5'9" high, are one-over-one double-hung. A wide frieze board follows the roof line under the wide, boxed eaves. Ornamental wood brackets, jigsawed and incised, survive beneath the jerkinheads and the front gable. The low, gabled rear section, approximately 24' long by 12' wide, contains one story and an attic. It is set on-end to the front section. A six-over-six, double-hung, wood-sash attic window is on the rear, west gable. The front section of the house has a foundation of rounded river stone set in mortar, and a partial basement across the front; the rear section has mud sills.

Exterior alterations are extensive. A veneer of asbestos siding has been applied over the original wood siding (horizontal channel rustic on the front section and clapboard on the rear wing). A one-story front porch with lathed columns was removed when the new siding was applied. Paired brackets at each corner of the front section (a total of eight) were removed when new downspouts were installed. The rear section has been further altered with aluminum windows and a shed-roofed addition along its south side.

The house's interior retains much of its original feeling. The front section contains a living room, bathroom and bedrooms, with a kitchen and dining area in the rear wing. The ground floor of the front section, with 9' ceilings, has a large living room occupying its southern half, with a bedroom at the front northeast corner and a bathroom at the rear northwest corner. A narrow staircase at the rear leads to the upper partial story, containing four similar bedrooms opening off a central hall. The upper-story ceiling slopes down from 9' at the center to 4'9" at the front and rear. All walls and ceilings of the front section are sheathed in 3-1/4" tongue-and-groove redwood siding (applied vertically on walls). Trim includes 5-1/2" routed doorway surrounds with bull's-eye blocks, 6" routed under-sills, and molding strips along ceiling corners. Four-paneled wood doors have porcelain knobs, and some retain iron lock mechanisms.

Interior alterations are relatively slight. Original pine floors have been covered with carpet and linoleum. All ceilings and walls have been painted (although the original varnished redwood survives in some closets). Interior partitions forming a bedroom at the southwest rear corner of the front section were removed to enlarge the living room. A central transverse partition in the rear section was removed to create one large room, which has been completely remodeled. The house is in good condition.

C. Barn (ca.1880-1885)

The barn is a wood-frame, rectangular-plan structure measuring approximately 50' long by 26' wide. The long axis is parallel to the road, with the principal elevation facing east. The tripartite roof, consisting of a central gable which flares into flanking sheds of a lower pitch, is clad in wood shingles which have been covered with corrugated metal. Eaves on the front and sides are boxed. The short sides and rear long side are sheathed in vertical redwood boards ranging in width from 8" to 12", with 3" battens applied to the short sides. The long side facing the road is clad in horizontal channel-rustic siding, 9" wide. This elevation is nearly symmetrical, exhibiting three doorways and a window on the ground level, and a loft opening flanked by windows on the upper level. Doors, of 3-1/4" vertical tongue-and-groove wood siding, are suspended by rollers from iron tracks. All upper-level openings have been enclosed by panels of the same vertical siding. The rear long side has three doorways at ground level and two small wood-sash windows in the gable. A pair of six-light, wood-sash windows is set into the north side wall.

The barn's interior contains two levels, each of which is divided into three bays by rows of posts. The south bay, with remnants of stalls and feeding troughs, is used for storage. The middle bay, also used for storage, originally housed farm equipment and a thrashing floor (Damas). The north bay now serves as a garage. The flooring of the south and middle bays consists of heavy planks laid on earth. The perimeter of the middle bay has a concrete foundation, while end bays have mud sills. A narrow, open stairway in the south bay leads to the middle bay of the upper-level loft, which is contained under the central gable. The flanking end bays of the loft, under the shed sections of the roof, have been partitioned off by horizontal wood siding applied to the posts.

Alterations are concentrated along the west (rear) long side of the barn. A recent wood-frame canopy with corrugated-metal shed roof, approximately 18' wide, extends the length of the long side. A new garage door has been cut into the north end of the wall, and the north bay of the interior has a recent concrete floor. The overall condition of the barn is very good, with some weathering evident on the boards of the south side.

D. Other Structures

1. Shed (ca.1880-1885) (photo CA-2289-A4). This is a small, wood-frame structure with rectangular plan and gable roof, approximately 13' long by 8' wide, located behind the house. It is clad in vertical redwood boards ranging in width from 11" to 14". A four-panel wood door with porcelain knob is set in the front, southeast-facing wall. A small, six-light, wood-sash window is set in the southwest side wall. Corrugated metal has been applied over the original wood shingles of the roof. The building is used for storage and is in good condition.

2. Water tower (ca.1945) (photo CA-2289-A4).. This is a wood-frame water tower from which the tank has been removed, located directly behind the house. It measures 14' across at the base and tapers upward, terminating at a platform approximately 18' off the ground. The open, post-and-beam structural system is set on a concrete foundation; structural members range in size from 3"x 6" to 6"x 6". The base is enclosed with wire mesh and used as a dog pen.

3. Shed (1947). This is a prefabricated, metal-frame structure, 48' long by 24' wide, located near the southeast corner of the site. The metal framing members rise from a concrete foundation, and the exterior is clad in corrugated metal. Although similar to a Quonset hut, with a rounded form, it differs by having a vertical wall along its principal long side, facing north. Doors and windows are set into the north and west sides. The interior is a single vaulted space used for storage.

4. Sheds (ca.1950). This is a connected series of three wood-frame sheds, approximately 38' long, located west of the barn and facing east. The composite structure, varying in width from 10' to 22', is clad primarily in vertical wood siding and has a corrugated-metal shed roof. The two northern sheds, or stalls, are open at the front, while the southern shed is enclosed. The building is used for storage.

5. Canopy (1986) (photo CA-2289-6). This is a covered storage area, measuring approximately 20' by 40', adjoining the metal shed on the west. Steel pipe columns support a wood-frame, corrugated-metal shed roof.

PART II HISTORY

A. Physical History:

The dates of construction of the earliest structures in the Santos Farm have not been documented. By 1874, the property, comprising three acres, was owned by Antonio Mideiras, who sold it that year to Francisco Pimenthal. Pimenthal sold the property to Manuel A. de Rosa in 1875, buying it back the following year. John J. Santos purchased the property from Pimenthal

in 1880 (Cartier and Laffey, 1987). It is likely that the rear gabled section of the house pre-dates the front section. The front section appears to date from the period ca.1880-1885, based on a stylistic assessment. The barn, which exhibits channel-rustic and tongue-and-groove siding similar to that used in the front section of the house, was probably built at about the same time. The same reasoning can be applied to the small gabled shed, which has siding and roofing similar to the barn.

Santos owned and farmed the three acres, living in the house, until his death sometime after 1932. His estate was divided between his four children. Two of his daughters each received one-acre parcels to the north and south of the farm complex. The third daughter, Maria Santos King Clark, inherited the house, outbuildings and 1.07-acre parcel which comprise the present property. The property was rented until 1943, when it was purchased by the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph G. Damas. (Cartier & Laffey, 1987; Damas, 1989.) The Damases have modified the property in a variety of ways. The existing water tower, purchased from a nearby farm, was reassembled behind the house. A metal-framed storage shed was erected from a prefabricated kit in 1947. The house was covered in asbestos shingles around 1950, at which time the front porch was removed. In 1956, partitions were removed from the front and rear sections of the house and portions of the interior remodeled. A shed addition was built off the rear section of the house about this time. A connected series of sheds was built west of the barn. In 1986, a new garage was built into the north end of the barn and a covered storage area added west of the metal shed. (Damas, 1989).

B. Historical Context:

Agriculture in northern California had its beginnings in the area encompassed by the modern city of Fremont. Mission San Jose, founded in 1797, had developed extensive gardens, orchards, vineyards, olive groves, wheat fields, and a water-powered grist mill prior to the secularization of its lands in 1834 (Hendricks, p. 16). Early settlers in the 1850s concentrated on the cultivation of grain and vegetables; some, like John Horner--a Mormon immigrant who had arrived in California in 1846--accumulated vast landholdings and networks of farms. Grain production remained dominant in northern California through the 1870s. The 1880s saw the widespread transition to fruit growing, beginning for the most part in Santa Clara County and spreading north into Alameda County. (Scott, p. 79). The Niles area was a forerunner of this trend, due in large part to the pioneering efforts of James Shinn, who established a fruit nursery in that vicinity in 1871 (Hendricks, pp.26-27). Niles would remain a fruit-growing center with important nurseries through at least the 1920s (Sandoval, p. 181). By World War I, a general shift occurred to vegetable production; the Niles-Centerville area, however remained known for its fruits.

The long and distinguished agricultural tradition in southern Alameda County has come to an end only with the onset of urbanization since the 1950s. As late as 1950, Washington Township had a population of only 20,000. When the city of Fremont was incorporated in January 1956, its boundaries encompassed most of Washington Township and five of its historic communities--Niles, Centerville, Irvington, Mission San Jose, and Warm Springs--and had a total population of about 22,400. The opening of the East Shore (later, Nimitz) Freeway south to Fremont in 1957 spurred tremendous population growth. The number of residents nearly doubled by 1960, and topped 100,000 by 1970. Fremont's estimated population in January 1988 was 165,200. This accelerating urbanization, primarily in the form of suburban housing developments, has transformed the area's traditional landscape and replaced most of its historic farm complexes. This is why the history and architecture of the Santos Farm are of such importance.

Portuguese immigrants began arriving in Alameda County in the early 1850s, many coming from the Azores Islands. The first known Portuguese settlers in Washington Township were four sailors who found employment on a farm. By 1860 many Portuguese and Azoreans were residents of Alameda County, some working as migratory workers, others prosperous farmers and landowners. John Joseph Santos was born in 1852 on Flores, the westernmost island in the Azores. By 1876, Santos had arrived in California and settled in southern Alameda County. That year, he bought a 3-acre parcel from Francisco Pimentel, a prominent member of the Bay Area's Portuguese community who had been instrumental in founding the area's first benevolent society for Portuguese immigrants (which by 1880 would evolve into the Portuguese Union of the State of California). According to family recollections, Santos planted his three acres in orchards. Others recall apricots and corn as specific crops (Damas, 1989). Santos is also remembered as one the five roadmasters of Washington Township, responsible for maintaining county roads under his jurisdiction. This position was created under the new county charter of 1927; as late as January 1932, at age 79 or 80, Santos still held the position (Country Club, p.29). Santos died in the bedroom of his house sometime in the 1930s. By the time of his death, and as late as 1956, Mowry Avenue north of present-day Fremont Blvd. was known as Santos Road (Oral History Associates, frontispiece), (Note: The source for all references to local Portuguese history and Santos family history, unless otherwise noted, is Cartier and Laffey, 1986).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings: None.

B. Early Views: None.

D. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Cartier, Robert, and Laffey, Glory Anne. "Addendum to Section 106, Historic Property Survey Report for the Mowry Avenue Widening Project between Parkside Drive and Peralta Blvd in the City of Fremont, County of Alameda," (Archeological Resource Management, April 1986). On file at Public Works Department, City of Fremont.

Corbett, Michael R. "Architectural and Historical Assessment of the Shaugnessy-Murphy Ranch, Milpitas, California," (Basin Research Associates, July 31, 1986). On file at Public Works Department, City of Milpitas.

"Request for Determination of Eligibility for Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places: Champion House and Santos Farm Complex, Fremont, California," (Earth Metrics Incorporated, May 1987). On file at Public Works Department, City of Fremont.

2. Secondary and published sources

Bancroft, Hubert Howe. *California Pioneer Register And Index, 1542-1848*. Baltimore, Regional Publishing Co., 1964.

Country Club of Washington Township Research Committee. *History of Washington Township*. Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1950.

Hansen, Gladys, ed. *San Francisco - The Bay And Its Cities*. New York, Hastings House, 1973.

Oakland Tribune. *Alameda County: The Eden of the Pacific; the Flower Garden of California*. Oakland, Oakland Tribune, 1898.

Oral History Associates. *City of Fremont - The First Thirty Years*. Fremont, Mission Peak Heritage Foundation, 1989.

Sandoval, John S. *The History of Washington Township*. Castro Valley, John S. Sandoval, 1985.

Scott, Mel. *The San Francisco Bay Area - A Metropolis In Perspective*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1959.

Thompson and West. *Official and Historical Atlas Map of Alameda County, California*. Oakland, Thompson and West, 1878.

Willard, Ruth Hendricks. *Alameda County, California Crossroads: An Illustrated History*. Windsor Publications, Inc., 1988.

Wood, M.W. *History of Alameda County, California*. Oakland, Pacific Press, 1883.

3. Interviews

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph G. Damas, September/October, 1989.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This Historic American Buildings Survey documentation of the Santos Farm was undertaken in compliance with a Memorandum of Agreement between the Federal Highway Administration and the California State Historic Preservation Officer. The contract work for the project was performed by Page & Turnbull, Inc., 364 Bush Street, San Francisco, Ca 94104; project manager was Jack Schafer.

Prepared by: Woodruff C. Minor
Title: Architectural Historian
Affiliation: Page & Turnbull, Inc.
Date: October 1989

SKETCH PLAN
SANTOS FARM
October 1989

SCALE 1" = 50'

